

THE BIRD OF SERBIA¹

BY JULIAN STREET

From Collier's Weekly

"HERE'S a queer item," remarked the man at the window end of the long leather-covered seat, looking up from his newspaper and apparently speaking in general to the other occupants of the Pullman smoking compartment. "There's a dispatch here announcing the death from tuberculosis of that Serbian who shot the Archduke of Austria at Sarajevo. It seems he has been in prison ever since. I thought he had been executed long ago."

Four of us, strangers to one another, had settled in the smoking compartment at the beginning of the journey from Chicago to New York, and as we had been on our way nearly an hour it seemed time for conversation.

"They did n't execute him," replied a man who sat in one of the chairs, "because he was under age. It's against the law, over there, to execute a person under twenty-one. This boy was only nineteen."

"The law would n't have cut much figure over here in a case like that," replied the first speaker.

"Perhaps not," returned the man in the chair, "but respect for law is one of the few benefits that seem to go with autocratic government. I don't find that dispatch in my paper. May I borrow yours?"

The other handed over the journal, indicating the item with his finger.

"I had almost forgotten that fellow," spoke up a third traveler. "The rush and magnitude of the war have carried our thoughts—and for the matter of that, our soldiers too—a pretty long way since the assassination

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occurred. Yet I suppose historians, digging back into the minute beginnings of the war, will all trace down to the shot fired by that Serbián."

"That's what the paper says," returned the one who had begun to talk. "It speaks of 'the historic shot fired in Serbia' as the thing that fired the world."

"And in doing so," declared the man who had borrowed the paper, "it falls into a popular error. The shot was *not* fired in Serbia, but in Austria-Hungary, and the boy who did the shooting was an Austro-Hungarian subject."

"But that does n't seem possible," interposed the man who had spoken of the historical aspect of the case. "If he was an Austrian subject and did the shooting in Austria, how could Austria make that an excuse for attacking Serbia?"

The other looked from the window for a moment before replying.

"It was one of the poorest excuses imaginable," he returned. "Autocracies can do those things; that's why they must be stamped out. As you said, historians will trace back to the assassination. It so happened that I was over there at the time and got a glimpse of what lay back of the assassination—microscopic, unclean forces of which historians will never hear, yet which seem peculiarly suitable in connection with Austria's crime. But I had better not get to talking about all that."

As though in indication of his intention to be silent, he closed his mouth firmly. It was a strong mouth and could shut with finality. Everything about him expressed strength and determination mixed, as these qualities often are in the highest type of American business man, with gentleness, good nature, and modesty. I liked his looks. He was the kind of man you would pick out to take care of your watch and pocketbook—or your wife—in case of emergency. I wanted him to go on talking, and said so, and when both the other men backed up my request, he began in a spirit evidently reluctant but obliging:

"For some years before the outbreak of this war," he said, "I represented a large American oil company in southeastern Europe, where we had a considerable mar-

ket. My headquarters were at Vienna, but my travels took me through various countries inhabited by people of the Serb race, and I found it advantageous to learn to speak the Serbian tongue, both for business reasons and because I enjoyed making friends among the people. In order to practice the language and form some knowledge of the people, I made it a custom, when traveling, to stop at small hotels used by the Serbs themselves, in preference to the more cosmopolitan establishments; or, where the small hotels were not clean, I would sometimes take a room with some Serbian family.

“In Bosnia there was one very attractive little city to which I was always particularly glad to go. It was a place of thirty or forty thousand inhabitants and lay in a lovely, fertile valley among the hills; and you may judge something of it by the fact that the Serbs coupled the adjective ‘golden’ with the town’s name. Not one American in a thousand — probably not one in a hundred thousand — had ever heard of the place then, yet it was the capital of Bosnia. The Austrian governor of Bosnia had his palace there, and the life of the place was like that of some great capital in miniature. One thing about the town which interested me was the way in which its people and its architecture reflected Bosnian history. In the first place there were many Serbs there, the more prosperous of them dressing like conventional Europeans — except that the fez was worn by almost all of them — and living in low, picturesque Serbian houses, with roofs of tile or flat stone shingle; the rest peasants in the Bosnian costume, who came in from the outlying agricultural regions. But also there were Mohammedans — leftovers from the days of Turkish dominion — and the town had minarets and other architectural signs of the Turk. And last there were the Austrians — the Austrian governor, Austrian soldiers in uniform about the streets, Austrian minor officials everywhere; and in new buildings, parks, and boulevards, Austrian taste. For, after taking Bosnia, under the Treaty of Berlin, in 1878, the Austrians, knowing well that their grabbing policy was criticized, went to some pains to beautify the Bosnian capital, with the object, it is commonly understood, of impressing visitors — and

perhaps also the inhabitants themselves — with the ‘benefits’ of Austrian rule — as though palaces, parks, pavements, and prostitutes were sufficient compensation to the Serbs for the racial unity and freedom which have been denied them, first by one nation, then by another.”

“But,” some one broke in, “up to the time of the present war, did n’t the Serbs have Serbia?”

“The present kingdom of Serbia proper was inhabited by Serbs,” returned the other, “but the Serbia we know is only a small part of what was, long ago, the Serbian Empire. Since the fall of the empire, in the fourteenth century, it has been the great ambition of the Serbs to become again a unified nation. Bosnia was a part of the old empire, but was conquered by the Turks, and later taken over by the Austrians. The story I am about to tell shows, however, what an enduring race consciousness the Bosnian Serbs have maintained.

“Our district manager for Bosnia lived in the town of which I have been speaking, and when I first went there he took me to a small but particularly clean and attractive hotel, run by an Austrian Serb. As is usual in small hotels in Europe, the proprietor’s family took part in the work of running the place; and as I used to stay there frequently, sometimes for two or three weeks at a stretch, I soon came to know them all well. As the years passed I became really attached to them, and there were many signs to show that they were fond of me. Michael, the father, exercised general supervision — though he was not above carrying a trunk upstairs; Stana, the mother, kept the accounts and superintended the cooking, which was excellent; the two daughters worked in the kitchen and sometimes helped wait on table. Even the boy, Gavriilo, the youngest member of the family, helped after school with light work, though he studied hard and was not very strong. I often sat with them at their own family table at one end of the dining-room; I called them all by their given names, and addressed them with the ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ of familiarity.

“When I first knew Gavriilo he was twelve or thirteen years old. His father, though of pure Serb blood, had acquired, with years and experience in business, a certain

resignation to the existing order of things. He had seen several wars and revolutions, and as he grew older had begun to think that peace under Austrian domination was better than continual conflict, whatever the cause.

"The boy Gavriló was, however, more like Stana, his mother. Stana could grow old, but the flame in her, the poetry, the mysticism, and above all the Serbian racial feeling, never diminished. Gavriló learned the Serbian folk stories and songs at her knee; also he learned from her Serbian history, which, under Austria, was not taught in the schools; for the Austrians have long desired to crush out Serbian racial feeling.

"Gavriló and I became great friends. He was hungry for knowledge and never tired of asking me about the United States and our freedom, free speech, and free opportunity — all of which, of course, seemed very wonderful to one growing up in a decadent, bureaucratic empire, made up of various races held together against their will. In return I gathered from Gavriló a considerable knowledge of Serb history and legend — and you may be sure that in what he told me, neither the Turks nor the Austrians came off very well. Even as a lad he always referred to the Austrians as *shvaba* — a Serbian word meaning something like our term boches — and by the time he was sixteen he had promoted them to be *proclete shvaba*, which may be freely translated as 'damned boches.'

"For a long time I took his strong anti-Austrian utterances lightly, considering them the result of boyish ebullience of spirit, but as he grew nearer manhood, and the fierceness of his feeling seemed to increase rather than diminish, I became concerned about him; for it is no wiser for an Austrian Serb to call the Austrians *shvaba* than it would be for an Alsatian to call the Prussians boches.

"As Gavriló grew up, his passionate racial feeling disturbed me more and more, though, of course, I sympathized with it. I determined to make an opportunity for a serious talk with him on the subject, and to that end suggested that he go with me to the neighboring hills for a couple of days' gunning; for Bosnia abounds in game.

"Gavrilo proved to be a 'very good shot. He would shoot wild pigeons, grouse, and woodcock from the hip, and he even brought along a pistol with which he could hit a hare at a considerable distance. These exhibitions of skill were, however, accompanied by remarks which did not make it easier for me to broach the topic upon which I wished to speak to him. When he would hit a pigeon he would exclaim: 'There goes another member of the Hapsburg family!' or: 'That one was a *shvab* tax collector!' or, mock-heroically, 'So much for you, you nobleman of brilliant plumage with a *von* before your name. No more will the peasants step out of the road and bow down before you!'

"'Look here, Gavrilo,' I said, when we sat to rest upon a fallen tree, 'you are a Serb, and that is something to be proud of, but after all, you are an Austrian subject; and your forefathers have been Austrian subjects for a long time. You have your home here, so why not make the best of a bad bargain, and be like the rest of the young fellows?'

"'You think I am not like them?' he replied. 'That is only because you do not know them as you know me. Every *momche* who is a worthy descendant of the race that fought to the death at Kossovo—the Field of the Black Bird—is of the *comitajia*. We younger fellows are to be *comitajia* also. We have our meetings in the same *kafana* where the others meet to make their plans. When we are a little older they will take us in and we shall all work together.'

"'But what is this work you speak of?'

"'Whatever it is,' he returned, 'you may be sure it is in the interest of our race.'

"'But you speak of *comitajia*,' I said. 'Has not that word more than one significance? I know the military scouts with bombs are *comitajia*, but are not revolutionists called by the same term?'

"Gavrilo showed his strong white teeth in one of those extraordinary mischievous smiles which now and then illuminated his face. Instead of giving me a direct answer he said:

"'Dear friend, I am glad to perceive that your knowl-

edge of our beloved Serbian tongue becomes daily more accurate.'

"'But, Gavriilo,' I protested, refusing to be put off with a jest, 'to be concerned in a revolution would be the worst thing that could happen to you.'

"'No, not the worst thing. Worse than being a Serb and joining in a revolution would be to be a Serb and fail to lift a hand in the struggle for freedom.'

"'Revolutions,' I said, sententiously, 'do not pay, Gavriilo.'

"'But since when has that been so?' he countered quickly. 'There was, for instance, the French Revolution. Did not that pay? And there was the American Revolution. Surely that paid! And there was the revolution of Serbia against the Turks. That is paying too.' His luminous black eyes, so like those of a wild deer, snapped as he spoke. Then his expression changed quickly to one of amusement over my discomfiture, and he added with a little laugh: 'I have an American friend—a gentleman who manages the business of a large oil company over here. He can tell you, as he has me, of the benefits of the American Revolution and of American freedom. I promise you that some day you shall meet him face to face—let us say to-morrow morning when he is shaving.'

"'It seemed to me that I had taken an unfortunate line with him there, so I tried another.'

"'Well, then, let us put it on selfish grounds. There is no great reason why you, personally, should be dissatisfied. You have good prospects in your father's business. The thing for you to do, in the natural course, is to marry and settle down. And certainly a man who has a sweetheart such as yours has n't any business in a *comitajia*; for such things lead to prisons and executions, not to domesticity.'

"'What makes you think I have a sweetheart?' he demanded, flushing.

"'Have n't I seen Mara?'

"'Well, what of it?'

"'If you can resist Mara,' I told him, 'you have more strength than I would give you credit for.' And it was

quite true; for Mara, who lived next door to the hotel, was a beautiful young thing, and they were much together.

“‘Mara is a flirt,’ said he.

“‘What matter,’ I returned, ‘so long as she flirts most with you?’

“‘But does she like me best?’ he mused. ‘There is this fellow in the Government railways who comes as often as he can to see her. He has the advantage of being a connection by marriage, and is very handsome. Really too handsome for a man. I am glad he does not live here all the time.’

“‘You have the advantage of living next door,’ I encouraged. The one thing that might interfere is this idea of yours about being one of the *comitajia*.’

“‘Still,’ he protested, shaking his head doubtfully, ‘a man’s first duty is not to the woman he loves, but to the race he loves, because both she and he belong to it. You know our old song?’ And he sang there in the woods:

“‘*Doucho, my soul, I love thee second best;
Thou art the dearest part of Serbia to me;
But after all thou art but a part, even as I am a part,
And it is Serbia, always Serbia, that together we love most!*’

“Though not altogether satisfied with our conversation, I felt that in appealing to the boy’s love for Mara I had struck the right note, and I hoped that as time went on he would think more about her than about the *comitajia*. For, though one may be heartily in sympathy with revolutionary ideas, especially in the case of an oppressed race, one does not like to see a youth of whom one is really fond, heading toward disaster, even in such a cause. Moreover, as I have said, Gavrilo was not as solidly built as the average Serb, and I had the feeling that the burning spirit in him—and I assure you it was more like a living flame than anything I have seen in the nature of man or woman—must either be kept under control or else destroy his body.

“Consequently I was much relieved to see, as I returned from time to time, that the boy-and-girl romance between Gavrilo and Mara was naturally and charmingly

developing into something more mature. This led me to hope the more that, as he turned from a youth into a man, Gavrilko would shed some of the violence of his revolutionary aspirations, and from the indications I judged that such a thing was indeed coming to pass. In order more fully to reassure myself, I more than once took occasion to lead conversations with him into such channels that, should he desire to do so, he could speak to me of the *comitajia*; but he always let the openings pass, seeming eager, now, to speak only of the lovely Mara.

"When, in the summer of 1913, I arrived for one of my periodical visits, Gavrilko came rushing to my room, and seizing both my hands told me that he and Mara were now betrothed. He was then eighteen and she seventeen—for you understand, of course, that these dark South Europeans develop younger than our people do. Both families were pleased, and I felt that the dangers I had feared for Gavrilko were past, and was duly thankful. I went out and bought a necklace for Mara, and when I gave it to her, she and Gavrilko made me clasp it around her neck, and he said to her, very seriously: 'Yes, and our dear friend shall be the godfather of our first child. Is it not so, Maro *doucho*?' And Mara, taking me by the hand, told me it was quite true, and that she was going to love me as much as Gavrilko loved me, and that, moreover, they were going to have hundreds of children, and that every one of the children should love me too. It was all indescribably naïve and pretty until Gavrilko unfortunately added: 'Yes, our children will love you, and they will love us, but most of all they will love the idea of a free Serb race.'

"At that a cloud passed over Mara's face.

"'Oh, Gavrilko!' she cried impatiently, 'shall we never hear of anything but the Serb race? Is there nothing else in the world? Must that come before your thought of your friend, here'—indicating me—'before your thought of me, of the children we hope to have, of everything? Must you have Serbian freedom on your bread in place of cheese, and in your glass in place of wine? Sometimes I think your eyes shine more brightly when you speak of our race than when you call me *doucho*—

my soul. I ask myself, is it indeed the soul of Mara that he loves, or is it the soul of the race?’

“‘Maro, my dear child,’ I put in, ‘I believe you are jealous.’

“‘Of whom, pray?’ she demanded, turning upon me and flinging her head back proudly.

“‘Not of an individual,’ I answered, ‘but of a people.’

“‘Perhaps it is true,’ she returned with a shrug. ‘Well, what of it?’

“‘Only this: that a woman with nothing more concrete than a whole race to be jealous of is in no very sad plight.’

“‘But I tell you I demand to be loved for myself!’ Mara flashed back.

“Gavrilo sighed deeply, as though at the hopelessness of making her understand his point of view. Then, mournfully, he hummed:

*“Thou art the dearest part of Serbia to me;
But after all thou art but a part, even as I am a part;
And it is Serbia, always Serbia—”*

“But Mara would not let him finish.

“‘Enough!’ she cried. ‘I detest that song! You know how I detest it!’

“Gavrilo looked at me and shook his head. ‘Oh, these women!’ he exclaimed. ‘What they do to one!’

“Then, gazing reflectively at Mara, he added in the tone of one attempting to be philosophical: ‘Well, when a little female looks as angelic as my Mara, naturally we expect her to think like an angel too.’

“At this Mara’s anger departed as quickly as it had come. ‘There!’ she exclaimed, flinging her arms about his neck and kissing him upon both cheeks, ‘there spoke my own dear Gavrilo! Poor Gavrilo! What have I been saying? You know I love the Serbs no less than you do! You do know it, don’t you? Well, then, say so!’

“‘God forbid that I should believe otherwise!’ answered Gavrilo, kissing her in return.

“As I left them I thought to myself that with Mara’s temperament, to say nothing of the ‘hundreds of children’ she promised him, Gavrilo’s married life would not prove monotonous, whatever else it might be. When, in

the course of the subsequent fall and winter, I saw them again, they seemed as happy as a pair of wild birds.

"Once, in the spring, when I was with them, the *comitajia* chanced in some way to be mentioned, whereupon Mara at once darkened, saying to me:

" 'That is my one sorrow.'

" 'But why should it be?' Gavriló asked her. 'Have I not plighted you my word that I shall not take part in any — well, in any indiscretions that may be proposed?'

" 'Yes, I have not forgotten. You said that as long as I loved you you would be my good Gavriló.'

" 'So,' he returned gaily, 'all you need do is to continue to adore me as I deserve.'

" 'But you meet with them at the *kafana*,' she said, uneasily.

" 'They are my friends,' he answered. 'Naturally, then, I meet with them. All men meet at the *kafana*. It is the way of men. A little wine or coffee or prune brandy and a little talk — that is all. I go also to church, but that does not make me a priest. And besides, dearest Maro, if I were not sometimes with the *momchidia*, how would I know the joy of returning to you?'

" 'If the devil had your tongue,' laughed Mara, 'he could talk all the saints out of heaven!'

" 'So it always was with Mara. Her ideas came and went — as Gavriló once put it to me — like humming birds flitting in and out amongst the flowers. Never have I seen a human being turn from gay to grave, and back again, as rapidly as she.

" 'Arriving at the little hotel in the early part of June, 1914, I found them all full of plans for a great fête to be celebrated on Vidov-dan — Kossovo Day — June 28. This day might be called the Serbian Fourth of July, but it partakes also of the character of our Memorial Day, for it is the anniversary of that tragic event in Serbian history, the Battle of Kossovo, in which the Turks defeated the Serbs in 1389, leaving the entire Serbian nobility dead upon the field. That is one reason why Serbia has no nobles to-day. 'Kossovo' means 'the field of the black bird,' the *kos* being a black songbird resembling the starling. But this was to be no ordinary celebration of the

holiday, for in the Balkan War of the two preceding years Serbia had consummated her independence and humbled the Turks, and a part of the Serbian racial dream was thereby realized. Mara, Gavriló, and their parents united in urging me to return for the festival, and before departing I agreed to do so.

"True to my word, I arrived several days ahead of time. Gavriló had not returned from the academy when I reached the hotel, but Michael and Stana gave me a warm welcome and produced the costumes they were intending to wear, and I remember that Stana said I ought to have a costume too—that even though I had not been so fortunate as to be born a Serb, they proposed to adopt me.

"'But you should see Mara's costume!' she exclaimed, when I admired hers. 'It is a true Serbian dress, very old, which came to her from her great-grandmother. Such beautiful embroidery you never saw.'

"That made a good excuse for me to go and see Mara, whom I found sewing in the little garden behind the house. The costume, which she showed me, was indeed beautiful, and I admired it in terms which were, I hope, sufficiently extravagant to please even a girl as exacting as she.

"While talking with her I observed a bird cage hanging on a hook by the window and, never having noticed it before, asked if she had a new bird.

"In reply she merely nodded, without looking up from her work.

"I strolled over and looked at the bird.

"'Why,' I said, 'this bird appears to be a *kos*, Maró.' Probably there was a note of surprise in my voice, for the *kos* is not supposed to live in captivity.

"Mara looked up sharply.

"'Are you visiting blame upon me, then?' she asked.

"'Not at all,' I answered, mystified at her tone. 'I did not know that the *kos* could be tamed; that is all.'

"'Did Gavriló tell you to speak to me about this?' she demanded.

"'Certainly not,' I answered. 'I have not seen Gavriló yet.' Then, crossing to where she sat, and looking down

at her, I asked: 'What is the matter, Maro?' How have I offended you?'

"Her eyes filled with tears as she looked up at me.

"'You have not offended me, dear friend,' she said. 'It is only that I am made miserable by this subject. My relative who is employed in the railway caught this bird a few days since, placed it in a cage, and presented it to me. And if he is a handsome young fellow, am I to be censured for that? I am not his mother nor yet his father; I did not make him handsome! And even so, what is a little bird, to make words and black looks over?'

"'You mean that Gavriilo is annoyed?'

"'Since this bird came,' she returned, 'I have heard of nothing else. He begs me to let it go. He insists that it will die. He says the man who gave it me is cruel and that I am cruel too.'

"'Then why not release it?' I suggested. 'It is dying in the cage, Maro.'

"'Let it die, then!' she cried, and burst into a flood of tears.

"'Now, Maro,' I urged when the paroxysm had abated, 'what is all this about?'

"'Well,' she gulped, wiping her eyes, 'a girl must have a little character, must she not? She must make up her own mind occasionally about some little thing! Is not that true? Is the man she loves to tell her when to draw in her breath and when to let it go again? Is he to tell her when to wink her eyes? Is she to cease to think and do only as he thinks? Here came this young man—with the miserable bird. I desired it not. Then came Gavriilo, black and angry like a storm out of the mountains, ordering me to let the bird go. I wished to do as Gavriilo said, but as my relative had caught it and given it to me I felt I should first speak to him. Besides, he is older and knows a great deal, being in the Government railroads. And what did he say? "Maro," he said, "you do as you wish. If you wish to be a little fool, humor this boy. He is spoiled. He has everything as he desires it. They say you are to marry him. Very well. But if you think always with his mind, and hold no ideas

of your own, I tell you you will make a wife no better than one of those stupid Turkish women." . . . That is why I determined to retain the bird. There is a *kos* in every second tree. Well, then, is it not better that this one die than that my soul shall wither? Why should I be called Mara if I shall no longer be a separate being, but only Gavrilko in another body?'

"As she finished, we heard Gavrilko calling her name from the street, and a moment later he came in through the garden gate.

"I saw at once that he was agitated.

"'So you have come!' he cried, seizing my hands. 'But, alas, my friend, it is in vain. You have heard the evil tidings?'

"'You mean about — ?' I had almost said 'about the bird,' but fortunately he interrupted, exclaiming:

"'Yes, about the festival.'

"'What tidings?' demanded Mara.

"Gavrilko threw his arms above his head in a gesture of helpless fury.

"'Those *procleto shvaba!*' he burst out. 'They issued an edict only an hour ago, forbidding entirely our festival of Vidov-dan!'

"'No!' cried Mara, dismayed, half rising from her seat.

"'Yes. There shall be no celebration — not for the Serbs. Nothing! Attempts to commemorate the anniversary will result in arrest. It is announced that in place of our festival there will upon that day be extensive maneuvers of the Austrian army and that Grand Headquarters will be here in our city. We are given to understand that the Archduke himself will come and hold the review. Could anything be devised more to insult us upon our national holiday? Oh, of what vile tricks are not these accursed *shvaba* capable?'

"'I am surprised,' I said, 'that the Archduke would be party to a thing of this kind, for it is understood that he is pro-Serb. Certainly his wife is a Slav.'

"'The more shame to her, then, for marrying him,' said Gavrilko, with a shrug. 'He is the spawn of an autocrat who is in turn the spawn of generations of auto-

crats. Scratch them and they are all the same. They play the game of empire—the dirty game of holding together, against their will, the people of seven races in Austria-Hungary; grinding them down, humiliating them, keeping them afraid. No man, no group of men, should have such power! It is medieval, grotesque, wicked!’

“‘More than that,’ put in Mara, ‘it is unwise. They take a poor way to gain favor with us Serbs. For my part, I do not think it safe for the Archduke to come here.’

“‘And there, my *mila*,’ he declared, with a shrewd, sinister smile, ‘your judgment is perhaps better than even you yourself suppose. Myself, I doubt he will be fool enough to come. At the last we shall be informed, with a grand flourish, that he is ‘indisposed.’ Not sick, you understand. Royalties are never sick. It is not etiquette. Peasants are sick. The middle-classes are ill. The great are only indisposed. Anything else is vulgar. Well, I hope he will know enough to stay away. Otherwise he may indeed become indisposed after his arrival.’

“‘What do you mean, Gavriilo?’ I asked.

“‘That the air of this place is not good for Austrian royalties just now,’ he said. ‘It is Serbian air. There are the germs of freedom in it, and such germs are more dangerous to autocrats than those of *kuga*,—cholera.’

“‘Be frank,’ I urged. ‘Do you mean that the Archduke’s life is threatened?’

“‘It is known,’ he replied, ‘that the governor has received warning letters. The Archduke is advised not to appear here on our holiday. One understands, moreover, that the Austrian secret police concur in this advice. Which shows that the filthy beasts are not so stupid as they might be.’

“‘Assure me, Gavriilo,’ Mara broke in, ‘that your *comitajia* has nought to do with this threat!’

“‘Long ago, he answered, ‘I promised you that while you love me I will not actively participate in anything violent. You may be sure, Maro, *mila*, that I shall keep my word.’

“‘You keep your word always,’ she replied, ‘but these

threats disturb me and I gain comfort from your reassurances.'

"Gavrilo walked slowly over and looked into the bird cage.

"'You are certain, then, that you do requite my affection?' he asked her over his shoulder.

"'You are well aware,' she said, 'that I worship you.'

"'Would that I were as well aware of it,' he returned, 'as that I am nothing to be worshiped.' Then after a pause he added: 'If you do love me, why not release this poor bird? See how wretchedly it huddles. Its eyes are becoming dull. It will surely die. How can we Serbs talk of freedom for ourselves, yet hold this wild creature prisoner? And of all birds, a *kos*—the bird of Kossovo! Permit me to open the door of the cage, Maro. Let us celebrate the Serbian holiday by liberating the poor *kos*. *Shvabe* cannot prevent that, with all their edicts.'

"Mara looked black.

"'The holiday is not yet here!' said she.

"'When the day comes,' he answered, 'the *kos* will be dead.'

"'I wish it were already dead!' she exclaimed petulantly. 'I wish I had never seen the accursed thing. It has brought me only sorrow!'

"'Then,' I interjected, 'why not let it fly away?'

"'I have told you both,' she answered angrily. 'This means more to me than the life or death of a bird. It is a symbol. I have the feeling that if it were to fly away all my will power would fly with it.'

"'And to me also,' returned the boy solemnly, 'this means more than the life or death of a bird. And likewise to me the *kos* is a symbol. It should be so to every Serb. Think of Kossovo! This is a bird linked with our racial aspirations. If we free this one, we may, perhaps, ourselves deserve freedom. Otherwise, what do we deserve? Do we merit more than we ourselves give?'

"Having witnessed Mara's agitation when she first told me of their differences over the bird, I would now have stopped Gavrilo could I have signaled him, but he was engaged in putting some green leaves through the door of the cage. As he finished speaking, Mara rose, dropped

her sewing upon the ground, and bursting into tears ran into the house.

“‘Maro, *mila!*’ Gavriilo cried, attempting to catch her; but the door slammed in his face.

“He was white as he turned to me. ‘Tell me,’ he cried in a tone childlike and baffled, ‘can anyone understand the ways of woman? As men grow older do they understand better, or is it always like this?’

“Deeply concerned about them as I was, the naïveté of this question forced a smile from me.

“‘You must ask some man older than I,’ I answered.

“‘Perhaps we are not intended to understand them,’ he said reflectively. ‘No doubt the Lord made them as they are so that we should forever be enthralled by them, as by any other enigma beyond comprehension. I enjoy lying on my back at night, to gaze up at the stars and think profoundly of eternity whirling about us, and the infinity of space, but I assure you, when my lovely Mara becomes agitated those phenomena of nature seem, by contrast, trifling matters. I believe that if one could but understand Mara, one could understand the riddles of the ages.’

“I left Gavriilo in the garden. At dinner that night he was not with us. I did not see him again until next evening, when I came upon him whispering with three young men upon the stairs. As I passed them they became silent, nor did I like the nervous smile with which Gavriilo greeted me. On the day following I saw him go into a *kafana* with the same youths. I think he also saw me, and from the haste with which he moved into the little café I gathered the impression that he was avoiding me.

“On the day before the maneuvers I cornered him after luncheon. Clearly he was keyed to a highly nervous tension.

“‘Gavriilo,’ I said, ‘do not tell me anything you do not wish to. I have no desire to pry into your affairs. But I beg you to remember Mara and your promise to her, and not to become entangled in any rash escapade.’

“For a moment he stood looking at me without answering. It was as though he was carefully formulating a reply. Then he said:

“‘I *have* remembered. I have positively refused to participate in certain matters in which I have been pressed to become active. At this moment that is all that I am enabled to say.’

“‘It is all I desire to know, I said. ‘Tell me, what of Mara?’

“‘All is well between us,’ he returned, ‘so long as one mentions not the bird.’

“Later I found them together in the garden. Mara was, as usual, sewing. While I sat and talked with her, Gavriilo started picking fresh leaves to put into the bird cage. Mara, who had been telling me how, upon the morrow, the Serbs were to leave their shutters closed all day, so that they should not see the Austrians, ceased to speak as Gavriilo began gathering the leaves, and watched him narrowly for a moment.

“‘Gavriilo,’ she said, ‘please put no more leaves into the cage.’

“‘Why not?’

“‘Because it is not well for him. He has been pecking at the leaves and I think they poison him.’

“‘No,’ said Gavriilo.

“‘Yes,’ she insisted. ‘He appears miserable to-day.’

“‘But naturally!’ returned the youth. ‘That is not new. He is dying. See how he is huddled with closed eyes in the corner of the cage.’ As he spoke he plucked another leaf.

“Mara’s expression became ominous.

“‘If he should die,’ she said in a quavering voice, ‘it will be because of the leaves which you have given him!’

“‘Impossible,’ Gavriilo replied. ‘Does not a bird live among the leaves?’

“‘I tell you,’ she exclaimed, ‘I have asked the old bird man about it. He says some leaves are good and some are not. He is coming this evening to see the *kos* and give it medicine in its water.’

“I was relieved when Gavriilo pressed the point no farther but dropped the fresh leaves on the ground. Feeling that a situation had been narrowly averted, I thought best to leave them together.

“That evening, as I was walking toward the hotel

from the square at the center of the town, I saw him coming out of the *kafana* with several of the youths I had come to recognize as his friends. He joined me and we walked along together. At Mara's garden gate he halted, saying: 'Let us enter and see the poor bird.'

"'No, Gavriilo,' I said warningly. 'It is not the bird we go to see, but Mara.'

"'So be it,' he replied. 'Let us then visit Mara.'

"Mara was not in the garden. Gavriilo called her name. She answered from the house, and a moment later came out to meet us.

"As she emerged I saw her glance at the bird cage. Then she gave a startled cry.

"'Look!' she wailed. 'The *kos* is dead!'

"It was true; there lay the bird upon its back among the dry leaves at the bottom of the cage.

"For a time we stood in silence, regarding it through the bars. I knew that Gavriilo and Mara were filled with emotion, and for my own part I was surprised to discover how much the death of the bird seemed to mean to me. When, a day or two before, they had spoken of symbolism in connection with the *kos*, I knew what they meant, but did not feel it: yet now I felt it strongly, as though I myself were a Serb, with a Serb's vision and superstition. It was not a dead bird that I saw, but a climax in a parable—a story of scriptural flavor, fraught with uncanny meaning.

"Gavriilo was the first to speak.

"'Poor *kos*!' he said in a low, tragic tone. 'It is free at last. It was written that it should not be captive when to-morrow dawns.'

"'What do you mean?' demanded Mara.

"'I told you it was destined to die unless you let it go,' he answered gently.

"'And as I would not let it go,' she retorted, 'you desired that it should die, in accordance with your prophecy! Yes, that is it! You made it die! You placed the leaves of henbane in its cage and killed it!'

"'You are excited, Maro,' he returned. 'You must know that I desired the poor bird to live. Let us dig a little grave here in the garden and bury it, and cease to

“speak of it until we are calmer. We are overwrought — both of us — because of the bitterness of to-morrow. Where is the spade?”

“‘Do not touch the *kos*!’ she commanded: ‘It shall not be buried yet.’

“‘Why not?’ I interposed. ‘It will be better for us all.’

“‘The old bird man comes this evening,’ Mara flung back. ‘He will look at the bird and know that Gavrilko has poisoned it with henbane.’

“‘But, Maro,’ I returned, ‘Gavrilko has said that he did not. You know that he is truthful.’

“‘His words mean nothing!’ she cried. ‘Am I not a Serb? Do I not read the meanings in events? Gavrilko lies. Gavrilko killed the *kos*. He is a murderer. I hate him!’

“‘Ah!’ he exclaimed. ‘You give me the truth at last!’

“‘Yes, the truth!’

“‘So much the better that I know in time!’ cried Gavrilko, and without another word he ran frantically from the garden.

“As for Mara, she seemed almost on the brink of madness. I do not know how long I remained there trying to reason with her, calm her, make her see the folly and danger of what she had done. By the time her passion had abated the late June twilight had settled over the town. Presently I heard the garden gate open, and a moment later a venerable Serb appeared.

“‘Wait!’ Mara said to me. ‘Now you shall learn that I was right!’

“Then, to the old man, she said: ‘You are too late to cure my bird, but you are not too late to tell me from what cause came its death. Look at this leaf that was placed in its cage. Is not that the henbane?’

“The old man took the leaf, inspected it, and shook his head.

“‘No,’ said he. ‘Let me see the bird.’

“‘It lies there in the cage.’

“He opened the cage door and, reaching in, removed the little body.

“‘Ah,’ he said, ‘a *kos*. Do you not know, my child, that birds of this species cannot long survive captivity?’

“Mara hung her head.

“‘I have heard it said,’ she answered in a low voice.

“‘To imprison wild birds is cruel,’ remarked the old bird man. ‘These birds, in particular, are the Serbs of the air. They are descended from birds that saw the field of Kossovo. They desire only to be free.’ Then, as Mara did not reply, he said: ‘Bring a light.’

“She went into the house and emerged with a lamp, placing it upon a table near the door. The old bird man sat down beside the table and, holding the bird near the light, brushed back the soft plumage of its breast, much in the manner of peasant mothers whom one sees, occasionally, searching with unpleasant suggestiveness in their children’s hair.

“‘Look,’ he said, ‘the bird would have died of these, even had it survived captivity. It is covered with animalculæ. In a cage it could not rid itself of them as nature enables free creatures to do.’

“Looking at the bird’s breast, Mara and I could see the deadly vermin.

“‘Give me a spade,’ said the old man. ‘I will inter the bird here in the garden.’

“Mara indicated a spade leaning against the wall. Then, turning with beseeching eyes to me, she seized both my hands, and said in a low, intense voice:

“‘Go, I pray you, and find Gavriló! Tell him that I implore his forgiveness. Say that I love him better than all the world and ask only that he come to me at once.’

“I went directly to the hotel and to Gavriló’s room. He was not there. No one about the place had seen him. I then went to the *kafana* which I knew he patronized, but the proprietor declared that he knew nothing of his whereabouts. Through the remainder of the evening I diligently searched the town, going to the houses of all his friends, but nowhere could I find a trace of him. Obligated at last to acknowledge myself defeated, I returned to the hotel. Several times during the night I arose and stole to his room, but daylight came without his

putting in an appearance. Early in the morning I went again to the *kafana*, but though I learned there that the Archduke had arrived the night before with his wife and his suite, and was housed at the governor's palace, I got no word of the missing boy. Wherefore, after breakfast, it became my unpleasant duty to go to Mara, inform her of my failure, and comfort her as best I might.

"She looked ill and terrified. I wished that she would weep.

"Thinking perhaps to find him in the central square of the town before the Archduke, the governor, and the other officials set out for the review, I was moving in that direction when there came to my ears the dull sound of an explosion. Continuing on my way, I encountered as I rounded the next corner a scattering crowd of men, women, and children, running toward me, in the street.

"I asked two or three of them what had happened, but they ran on without reply. Presently, among them, I saw one of the youths with whom I had several times seen Gavrilo, and him I seized by the coat, demanding information.

"‘Let me go!’ he cried. ‘Some one threw a bomb into the Archduke’s carriage! They are arresting everyone. Get away!’ And he tugged violently to escape my hold.

"‘Have you seen Gavrilo?’

"‘Not to-day.’

"‘Is the Archduke dead?’

"‘No. He warded off the bomb and it exploded beneath the carriage which followed. For God’s sake, release me!’

"I did so, and walked on toward the square. Halfway down the block I met some Austrian police. After questioning me briefly they let me go, whereafter I questioned them. The horses drawing the second carriage had been killed, they said, and some officers of the archducal suite injured. The Archduke, however, insisted upon continuing to the review and would presently pass. They advised me to return to my hotel.

"I had hardly reached my room when I heard a bugle and the clatter of hoofs outside. Going to the window,

I saw mounted men of the Royal Austrian Guard advancing around the corner. Behind them, between double rows of cavalry, came several landaus, carrying outriders, and driven by coachmen in white wigs and knee breeches. As the first of these vehicles came nearer, I saw that the occupants of the back seat were Francis Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria, heir apparent to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his morganatic wife, the Duchess of Hohenberg.

"The shutters of most of the houses were closed, but in a few windows I saw faces, and there were scattered knots of people on the sidewalks, closely watched by the policemen who rode ahead on horses and bicycles. As the archducal carriage came along, hats were raised, and once or twice I heard faint cheering, which the Archduke and his consort acknowledged, he by touching the visor of his helmet, she by inclining her head.

"As their carriage came below my window and I saw the expression of condescending good will frozen on both their faces, and thought of the constant apprehension there must be behind those polite masks, it struck me as amazing that a man and woman could be found, in these times, to play the royal part.

"As I was thinking thus I saw a dark-clad figure dart out suddenly from somewhere on the sidewalk, below, pass swiftly between the horses of the bodyguard, and reach the side of the royal carriage. Some of the guardsmen leaped at once from their horses and there was a dash of policemen toward the man, but before anyone laid hands upon him he raised one arm, as though pointing accusingly at the Archduke and his Countess, and there followed, in swift succession, two sharp reports.

"I saw the royal pair fall forward. Simultaneously the carriage stopped and was at once surrounded by an agitated group of soldiers, policemen, and servants; while another and more violent group pressed about the individual who had fired the shots, beating him as they swept him away down the street. Before they had gone a dozen yards, however, a high official, who had jumped out of the second carriage, ran up and directed them to take the man to the sidewalk. This brought the crowd in my

direction, and it was only as they turned toward me that I caught a glimpse of the face of their prisoner. As I had dreaded, it was poor Gavrilo."

For a moment all of us were too thunderstruck to speak. Somehow the picture he had given us did not seem to be that of an assassin, as one imagines such a man.

"You mean to say," asked the man by the window slowly, "that this very boy you've been telling us about was the one who shot the Archduke?"

"Yes," said the other, "he was Gavrilo Prinzip of Sarajevo."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the third. "The boy who brought on the war!"

"As we were saying earlier," returned the one who had told the tale, "historians will doubtless trace the beginnings of the war to Gavrilo's shot. Certainly Austria used the shot as her excuse, alleging that a plot to kill the Archduke had been hatched in Serbia—which was absolutely untrue, for Serbia was afraid of nothing so much as of giving offense to Austria, knowing well that Austria was only seeking a pretext to pounce upon her, precisely as she had earlier pounced upon Bosnia and Herzegovina, annexing them."

After a thoughtful pause he added: "Poor Gavrilo! I am glad to know that he is free at last. Like Mara's starling, he was not one to live long in a cage. And it is perhaps because I was so fond of him, and also because Austria's excuse was so transparently despicable, that I shall always go behind the shooting in thinking of the beginning of the war. As I conceive it, it was Mara's anger that released Gavrilo from the promise which, otherwise, would have withheld him. And it was the death of the caged starling that brought on her anger. And it was the animalculæ that caused the bird's death."

"That is," put in the man by the window, "you prefer to trace the war down to such a small beginning as the death of that caged bird?"

"Rather," replied the other, "to a still smaller and more repulsive beginning—to the vermin which destroyed the bird. It seems to me I see them always crawling through the explanations, apologies, excuses, war messages, and peace overtures of the Teutonic autocrats."